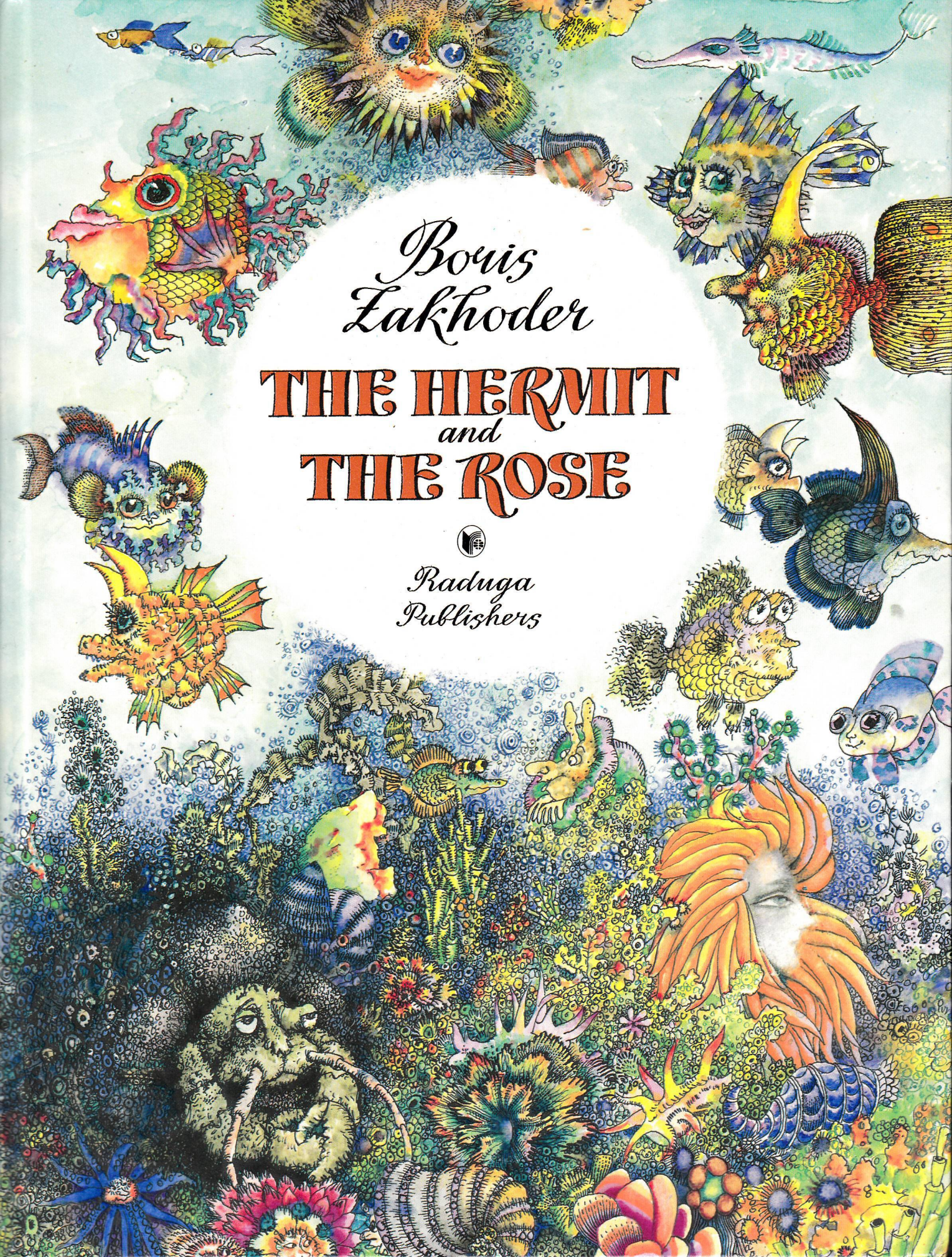


Boris Zakhoder

THE HERMIT and THE ROSE

Raduga Publishers





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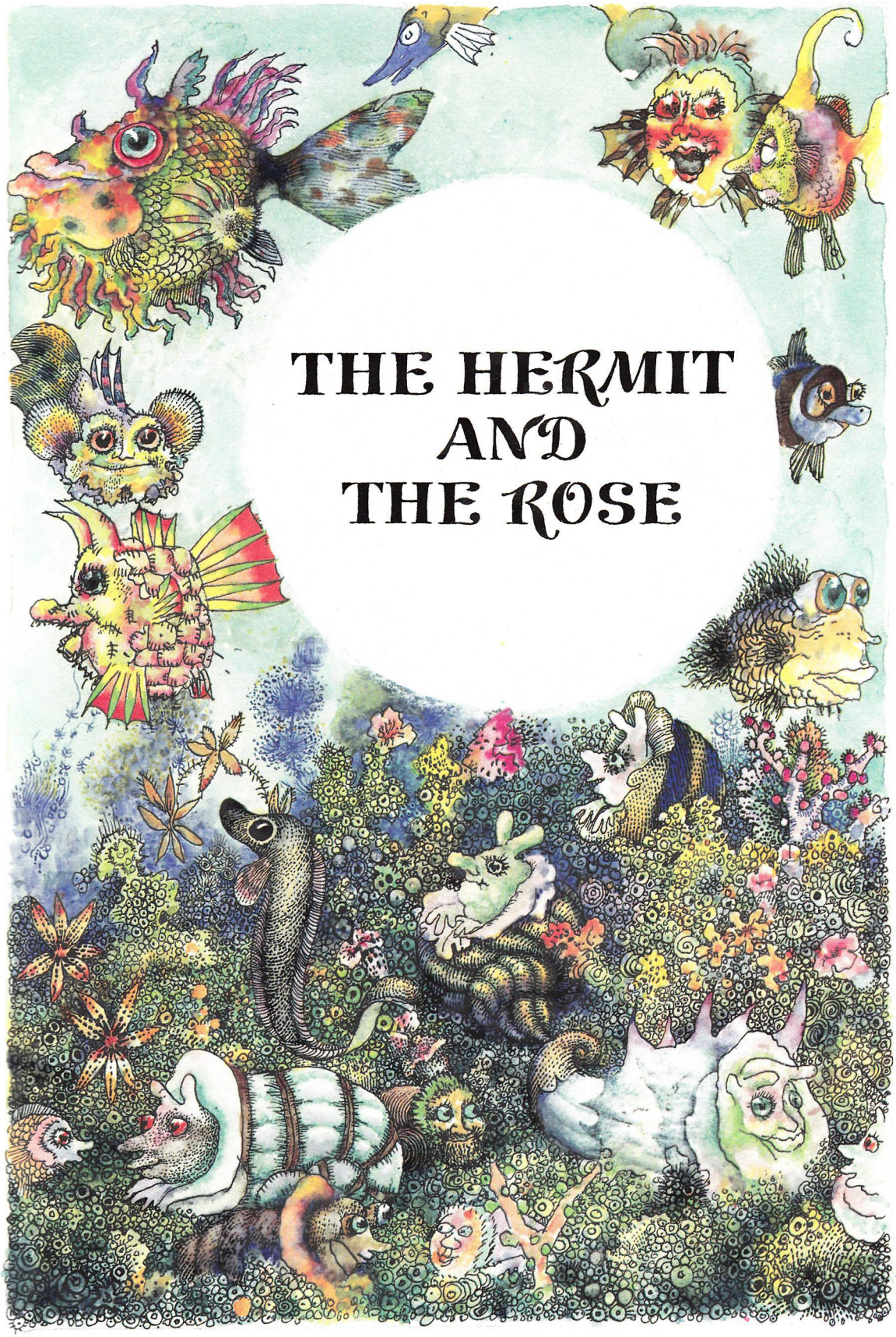
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Raduga Publishers Moscow




THE HERMIT
AND
THE ROSE



I

In the Blue Sea there lived a little Crab. And he was very miserable, so miserable that he couldn't understand why the sea was called Blue, because to him it always looked absolutely grey.

* English translation © Raduga Publishers 1988



Yes, it was all very strange.

In fact the sea really was blue and it was great fun to live in. The fish (it was only in the old days that people thought they couldn't speak) had even made up a merry little ditty about what fun it was to live in the sea.

Nobody anywhere
The whole world over
Has more fun
Than fish in water!
No people
Or animals
In any
Clime,
Nobody has such a lovely time!
Yes, nobody anywhere
The whole world over
Has more fun than fish in water!

And they sang it the whole day long. The Sea Stars shone brightly, even the wise old Dolphins frisked about like lambs, but the poor Crab sat hunched up in a crevice as miserable as could be.

He had everything a real crab was supposed to have: five pairs of legs, eyes on stalks, long, long whiskers and powerful claws. Only he didn't have a shell. His body was soft all over. Perhaps that was why everyone who did have a shell, and a lot of other creatures too, used to laugh at him, pinch him, bite him and sometimes even try to eat him...

And he sang this mournful ditty:

Oh, the sea has lots of water
And the sea has lots of space,
But you can feel very mizzy
And unhappy in this place!

"The trouble is you're not hard enough," said one of his distant relatives, Uncle Crab, who always walked sideways. "You can't be soft-skinned these days!"

And to prove his point he gave poor Crab a hard pinch.

"Ouch!" cried Crab. "That hurts!"

"It's for your own good," said Uncle Crab, very pleased with himself. "It's nothing to do with me, of course, but if I were you I'd try to get myself a decent shell."

And off he scuttled sideways. For the Hermit had sharp claws as strong as any real crab and perhaps even stronger...

Yes, I forgot to tell you that the crab was called the Hermit, because, as you know, he was forever hiding away in cracks and crevices or under rocks, so that he didn't get pinched.

He was first nicknamed the Hermit by the Sea Horse, who loves poking fun at people, then the Sea Parrots (yes, they do exist) followed suit and soon everyone in the Blue Sea and on the dry land too was calling him by the name of the Hermit Crab.

"That wasn't a bad pinch," thought the Hermit, when the pain had gone down a bit. "And the advice wasn't bad either! Perhaps I really should consider doing that."

As you can see, the Hermit was not only good at feeling miserable, he could also use his head, in fact, he was a very clever crab!

There were lots of shells around. After thinking hard, he

decided: "The best place for a crab is in a shell, of course; and the best inmate for a shell is, of course, a crab. And when a crab crawls into a shell, no one can pinch him, unless I'm very mistaken about shells and crabs."

So he knocked on the first shell he came to and tried to explain all this to the owner, but the angry Mollusc who looked out exclaimed without letting him finish:

"Nonsense! I'm busy!" And bolted the door of its shell fast.

"The best place for a crab is in a shell," the Hermit continued, knocking on a second shell, but another very angry Mollusc looked out of this one too and exclaimed:

"Nonsense!"

And also bolted the door right under the Hermit's nose (although crabs don't actually have noses, as you know).

But when he knocked on the third shell nobody looked out because there was nobody inside, and–oh, joy! It turned out to be just the right size, not too big and not too small–just the job.

"Yes, we were made for each other," thought the Hermit, when he had squeezed his soft body into the shell. "What could be better! Now no one can pinch me!"

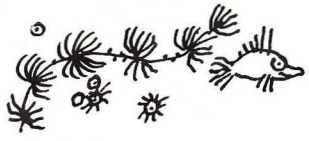
And he didn't even take any notice when the Sea Horse, who was bobbing about closeby, gave a shrill neigh (meaning that he was about to say something sarcastic) and squealed:

"Tee, hee, hee! Our Hermit has retired into his shell!"

And the Parrot Fish, who to tell the truth did not under-



stand this joke at all, repeated it parrot-fashion and spread it all over the Blue Sea.
Still when you've got everything a person needs for perfect happiness you can put up with a joke like that, can't you?



II

But strangely enough, although no one (not even Uncle Crab) could pinch or bite our Hermit anymore (not even for his own good), he obviously still lacked something for perfect happiness. Otherwise why did the sea still look so grey to him? And why did he go on singing his sad little ditty?

Oh, the sea has lots of space
But I can't find a place
Where a little crab like me
Could really happy be.

One day he could stand it no longer and said to a Flying Fish who was passing by:

"How strange it is to live in the Grey Sea! I know there is a White Sea, a Yellow Sea and even a Red Sea, but no one has ever heard of a Grey Sea..."

"Grey!" the Flying Fish laughed. "Why, it's not grey at all!

It's azure, aquamarine, emerald and cornflower. It's a lovely bright blue, the brightest blue you've ever seen!"

And she hurried off after her friends who had soared up to the surface to admire the blue white-crested waves.

"Everyone I ask says it's blue. That's funny!" the Hermit thought to himself. "Why do I alone not see it? Only I alone!"

"That's why," a voice replied so unexpectedly that the Hermit was startled and hid in his shell.

When he peeped out, he saw–what do you think? The kindest and wisest of all the sea magicians. Yes, you're right. It was the Dolphin.

"It's precisely because you are alone!" said the Dolphin. "Find yourself a friend and you'll see! Good luck, and reflect upon my words."

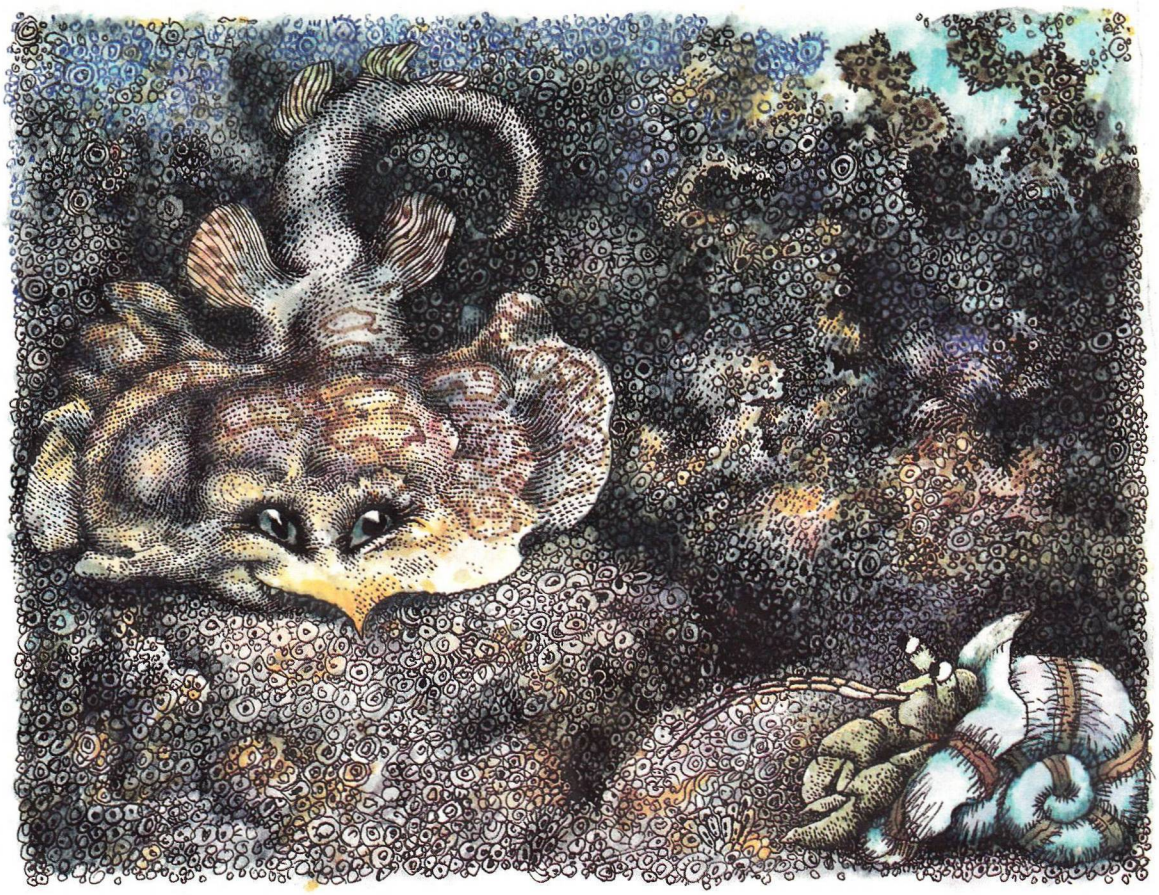
And the Dolphin (who, like all magicians, liked to talk in riddles) swam off with a swish of his tail and went about his business.

The Hermit (who, as you know, was good at using his head as well as being miserable) began to think hard...

And this is what he decided.

"The Dolphin said it was because I'm alone. Well, of course, when I find a friend, I won't be alone anymore... And what will I see then? Well, of course, I'll see the sea turn blue... And probably everything will be fine! So I must look for a friend. The trouble is I don't know what friends are, or where they live, or what they look like. Never mind, I'll know at once when I find a real friend, because the sea will turn blue."

And so saying the Hermit set off to look for a friend and to tell the truth this is where our story really begins.



III

I should add that finding a real friend is not that easy, even on the sea bed. Particularly if you don't know what they look like...

The Hermit visited the shallows and the deep waters and saw many strange creatures, even some monsters, but did not find himself a friend.

In the shallows he met the Ray and asked him if he was a friend. And the Ray, who had been lying in wait for incautious fish all day, said to him:

"Oh, I'm a friend to you, of course! Come over here and

we'll never part!" And he opened his huge hungry mouth...

Fortunately our Hermit, as you well know, was very clever. He realised that the Ray was looking for his supper, not a friend, and made himself scarce, while the disappointed Ray muttered his terrible song to himself. It went like this:

Why be in such a hurry, friends?
It's better far to crawl.
Don't move at such a speed, my friends,
And I will greet you all.

And he was right in a way, because it's much easier for the Ray to catch something that is crawling than something that is swimming.

In the sea depths where eternal darkness reigns, the Hermit saw a point of light and swam gladly towards it. It was a deep-water fish with such a hard name that the fish herself did not know it. When she caught sight of the Hermit, she tried to lure him towards her with her shining rod, and if he had been tempted by the bait, he would have fared badly, for this deep-water fish has as big a mouth as the Ray...

He greeted the Cucumaria Frondosa and tried to strike up a conversation with her, but the cowardly creature was so scared that she turned inside out and shot her innards at him, because she thought he was an enemy. That's the way these molluscs protect themselves...

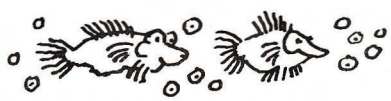
He tried to make friends with the beautiful Medusa, but she turned out to be not only stupid but also poisonous, and he barely escaped her lethal tentacles.

In short, no matter how he searched, he found nothing.

Some were afraid of him, some poked fun at him, some tried to eat him, and, of course, none of these could really be considered good friends!

So at last, very tired and very, very sad, he sat down to rest and said:

"I have scoured the sea bed and not found a friend anywhere. And the sea is still grey. Perhaps it will always be grey for me. Oh dear, I'd drown myself, if only I could!"



IV

At that moment he heard someone repeat his own words, with a deep sigh, like an echo.

"Oh dear, I'd drown myself, if only I could!"

The Hermit looked round (or rather swivelled his eyes round, because they were on stalks, as you will remember) and saw no one. No one, that is, except the Rose, the Sea Rose. But sea roses (clever people call them actinia) can't sigh, even though they aren't flowers.

Then there was another sigh, followed by some sobbing. And there was nobody else around except the Rose, the Sea Rose.

"Is that you crying?" asked the Hermit in surprise.

He nearly added "Can you cry?" but just stopped himself in time.



The Rose said nothing, but since she cried even more loudly, there was really no need for an answer.

"Why are you crying? Has someone been nasty to you?" asked the Hermit (who was soft-hearted, as well as being soft-skinned).

"No one dare be nasty to me!" said the Rose. "No one in the whole sea dare lay a finger on me."

And she straightened up proudly and even stopped crying.

"Then why are you crying?" the Hermit asked her, so gently that the Rose relented and answered:

"I'm just sad. Sad because the sea's so grey! If I found a friend, everything would be different. But I can't walk, so all I can do is stand here feeling miserable..."

The Hermit wanted to tell her that he had scoured the sea bed and not found a friend anywhere, but he felt sorry for the poor Rose, particularly as she was so pretty.

And he said to her:

"I'm going round the sea bed looking for a friend too. We can go together, if you like, and perhaps if we're very, very lucky each of us will find a friend, and then the sea will turn blue and we won't feel miserable anymore."

"But I can't walk," said the Rose, and her petals drooped sadly.

"Oh, that's no great catastrophe," said the kind Hermit. "I can carry you, if you like. It would give me great pleasure."

The Rose was frightened to move from the spot where she had always stood, even though she was unhappy there... It's always like that.

But the Hermit spoke to her so affectionately and seemed so kind, that she agreed. The Hermit helped her get down

from the rock and climb onto his shell, and off they set.

The Rose began to feel dizzy, for she had never known before what it was like to move. Everything round her seemed to be whirling in a wild dance, the rocks, the seaweed, the oysters clamped to the sea bed, and the sea hedgehogs. She even turned pale, but did not utter a sound–for she was very, very proud!

After a few minutes she got used to it (particularly as the Hermit was not exactly racing along, if the truth were told) and began to enthuse loudly about everything she saw around her.

"Oh, how marvellous!" she exclaimed. "How easy it is to breathe, when you're not standing still! Oh, what pretty coloured fish! What are they called? And what are those shining things? Sea Stars, that's it! I didn't think they were so pretty. And what's that? And who's that? Oh, what fun it is to travel!"

The Hermit barely had time to answer her questions. Of course, he had seen everything she was enthusing about lots of times, but he thought to himself (for he really was very kind): "Let her enjoy herself, poor thing! She'll soon get as fed up with it as I am... Actually it's very nice to hear her enjoying herself! I wonder if I found a friend whether he and I would enjoy ourselves together or not?"

And he started thinking how sad it was that he would never, never find a friend. Suddenly, the Rose, who had been quiet for a moment, asked, as if she could read his thoughts:

"When are we going to look for friends?"

At this the Hermit could restrain himself no longer and told her the truth: how he had looked for a friend on the sea



bed and seen all sorts of creatures, even monsters, but not found a friend anywhere…

"Perhaps there just aren't any friends anywhere," he said sadly, "and it's better not to look for them?"

V

"That's not true!" said the Rose. "There are friends, I'm sure, and the only reason you didn't find any was because you didn't know where to look."

"Well, do you?" asked the Hermit.

"Yes, I do. Real friends live in Red City. They built it themselves and live there happily, and for them the sea is always blue! And you know, they say these friends are my sisters or brothers or some sort of relatives, so we must go there and they will be very glad to see us."

"Will they pinch us for our own good?" asked the Hermit, who at the word "relatives" immediately thought of Uncle Crab.

"I hope not," said the Rose proudly. "I told you no one dare lay a finger on me! If I don't want them to," she added, remembering that the Hermit had touched her when he was helping her climb onto his shell.

The Hermit was about to say that he found this very reassuring, although he himself had been pinched many a time, alas, but just at that moment who should appear but Uncle Crab himself.

"Morning, nephew," he muttered casually and was about to sidle past on his business (crabs always have an awful lot of business), when he suddenly noticed the Rose and his eyes goggled in amazement.

"And what might that be?" he asked, waving a fat claw in the direction of the Rose.

You could hardly say he was the perfect gentleman.

"It's who, not what. It's the Rose," the Hermit explained. "She and I are going to Red City to look for friends!"

Uncle Crab was even more surprised. His eyes shot right out on their long, long stalks.

"It's nothing to do with me, of course," he said, "but there is something I must tell you. Firstly, Red City is beyond the

seven seas, so you'll never get there! Secondly, its real name is not Red City, but something else, so you'll never find it! And thirdly, there are no friends there either, so there's no point in looking for it! In short, what your are proposing to do is ridiculous! And it's even more ridiculous to drag that object along with you." And he again pointed with his fat claw at the Rose.

The Rose blanched at the insult, and her petals folded.

Then Uncle Crab had another big surprise, for the Hermit (and I'm sure you haven't forgotten that he was very kind) lost his temper for the very first time in his life.

"How dare you insult the Rose!" he shouted and lunged at Uncle Crab.

Uncle Crab only just managed to get of the way in time.

"It's nothing to do with me, of course," he shouted, after scuttling off sideways to a safe distance, "but in one of the seven seas you are bound to meet Madame C., and she'll show you a thing or two! And I hope she jolly well does, wretched boy! For your own good!"

The Hermit grew alarmed. He knew only too well who Madame C. was. And he instinctively slowed his pace.

"Are you afraid?" the Rose asked him gently. "Tell me honestly. Are you afraid of Madame C.? Don't be! After all, you've got me with you!"

And strange though it seemed to the Hermit, he almost laughed.

Now Madame C. was what all the crabs and crayfish called their most terrible enemy, so terrible that they dared not even utter her full name. With her fearsome tentacles she could seize the strongest crab and he would be as helpless as



a newborn babe. And with her terrible jaws she could crack the strongest shell like an egg shell...

How could this poor little Rose help him if he were to meet Madame C.? What could she do?

But he did not laugh, for he did not want to offend the Rose.

"What will be, will be," he said bravely. "But all the same... All the same let's hope we don't meet her."

"But if we do, we'll show her a thing or two ourselves," said the Rose. The Hermit burst out laughing and was surprised to find that he was hardly afraid at all.

And so they continued on their way.



VI

Yes, it was a long journey indeed. Much longer than his first one around the sea bed. They went through the First Sea, the Second Sea, and the Third Sea–and that is much more quickly said than done. But the funny thing was that this long journey seemed much shorter to the Hermit.

Perhaps because on the way they shared everything, all their food, joys and sorrows, and chatted happily about everything they saw.

On and on they went, and when they arrived at the Fourth Sea, the Hermit suddenly felt that he was too big for his shell and climbed out of it to find another one.

"Wait a minute!" the Rose whispered to him. "Are you going to leave me here?"

"No, of course not," said the Hermit. "It's just that I've grown bigger and I need a bigger shell."

"No, you're going to leave me," the Rose insisted. She had turned a deathly pale.

So he had to spend a long time reassuring her, and she only believed him completely when he found another shell and sat her on it. And off they went again on their way.

"If you had left me, I would have died at once," said the Rose.

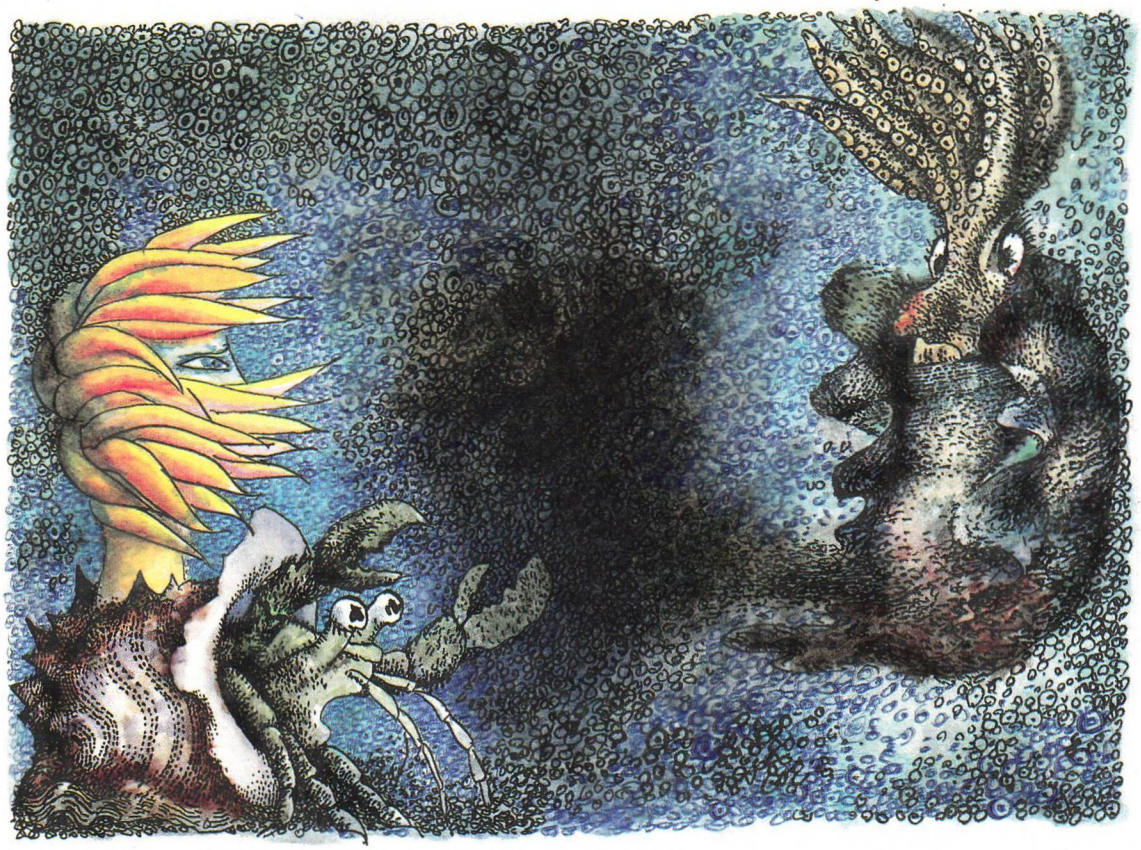
"So would I," said the Hermit sincerely.

The Rose beamed happily again and began regaling him with stories and all sorts of cheerful nonsense. As they were talking they did not notice the water getting warmer and warmer, and this could only mean that they had reached the Seventh Sea, the sea where the terrible Madame C. lived.

"Wait a minute, what's this?" said the Hermit and stopped, not listening to the end of the story about how the Hammer Fish (which actually exists) married the Anvil Fish (which actually does not exist) and they had lots of children: the Saw Fish, the Nail Fish, the Sickle Fish, the Tongs Fish, the File Fish, the Horseshoe Fish, the Sword Fish and many others some of which actually exist and others do not...

The Hermit stopped because in front of him was a terrible sight.

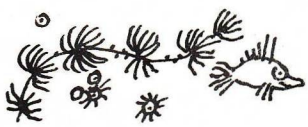
A ravine wound its way between towering cliffs, and at the entrance to the ravine lay a huge pile of crab shells. They were all empty, split in half like nuts and crushed like egg shells. The Hermit even thought he recognised Uncle Crab's



mutilated shell and claws among them. True, in such a mountain of shells, claws and feet it was hard to recognise any shell, even that of a relative…

One thing was clear: Madame C. lived somewhere near here.

But the way to Red City lay straight ahead, along the ravine.



VII

Slowly and cautiously the Hermit made his way along the ravine, testing every inch of the sea bed with his long whiskers and keeping a keen lookout, although he knew this was almost useless, because Madame C., like all her relatives, octopuses, squid or pen-fish, can make herself invisible when she likes, so that you can't tell her from a rock or a ball of sand, until she pounces on you, and then it's too late...

The ravine was growing narrower, the towering cliffs with their dark caverns steeper, and all around it was getting darker... But the Hermit plodded on...

Then it grew lighter, and the danger seemed to be past. They were only a few steps away from the end of the ravine, when suddenly a terrible pair of eyes flashed in a huge cave. Then some long tentacles appeared ... and slowly and silently Madame C. swam out of the cave. Although the Hermit had never seen her, he recognised her at once.

"Run for your life, Rose!" the Hermit shouted wildly.

In his horror he had even forgotten that the Rose couldn't walk and also that he could, for he stood rooted to the spot.

But he raised his claws menacingly to protect the Rose.

But the Cuttlefish (for that is Madame C.'s real name) took her time as she swam silently nearer and nearer. She was confident her prey would not escape her.

The Hermit could already make out the terrible suckers on the ends of her tentacles. Writhing like snakes, the tentacles slid closer and closer, until they seized the poor little Hermit and began dragging him up to where the large unblinking eyes were glittering. The fearsome jaws snapped.

The Hermit struggled desperately, but the tentacles were as strong as iron. His claws were helpless against them.

"This is the end," the thought went through his head. "Goodbye forever, Rose!"

At that moment a blinding flash of lightning struck the Cuttlefish's body at the very base of her tentacles. The Sea Rose had unloosed her fearful weapon, the lethal rays concealed in her beautiful petals.

Yes, she was right in saying that no one dare lay a finger on her.

Flash–the unblinking eyes clouded over. Flash–the tentacles released their victim and hung helplessly in the water. Flash again–and the Cuttlefish leapt back as if she had been scalded (which, in fact, she had!) after releasing an "ink bomb", a cloud of black liquid like ink. Everything was obscured for a moment by the blackness.

When the cloud dispersed, there was no sign of the Cuttlefish.

The way out of the ravine was clear.

"So who showed whom a thing or two?" asked the Rose.

VIII

The way was clear, and when our travellers came out onto a sand-bank they saw Red City shining in the dazzling sunlight! Its walls had fantastic shapes and rose in tiers higher

and higher until they vanished high above where the sea ends and the sky begins. And the sound of happy singing and constant chatter (remember how fond fish are of having a chat?) could be heard for miles around.

"Oo, what fun it must be to live here," the Hermit and the Rose both thought at the same time.

And although they had never seen Red City, they guessed at once that this was it. For the walls were the most marvellous shades of red, pink, crimson, scarlet and vermilion.

"Is this Red City?" they asked the first person they met in unison.

It turned out to be Doctor Crab, who was trying to cure a large Tunny Fish of sea-sickness. The doctor stopped what he was doing and said seriously:

"Hmm. Red City? Hmm! That's not its scientific name. You can call it Red City if you like, but actually it's Coral Reef! It was built by corals, and from the scientific point of view it is more correct to call this structure a Coral Reef."

"I've remembered!" the Rose exclaimed suddenly. "That's what my friends or relations are called–Corals! Yes, that's right. Come on, quickly!"

But when the Hermit and the Rose were so close to the city (or reef) that they could see the millions of tiny transparent corollas, very similar to the corolla of the Rose's petals (and that is just what corals look like), the Hermit stopped and said, at the very same moment as the Rose said just the same thing, so they said it in unison:

"I DON'T WANT ANY FRIENDS BUT YOU!"

"It's about time!" a familiar voice rang out. "Looking

for something you found long ago is just a waste of time."

It was the Dolphin, of course, the sea magician.

Seeing that neither the Hermit nor the Rose had understood him, he added:

"Funny pair! Surely you've realised by now that you are real friends. People say about real friends that water cannot part them. And seven whole seas haven't been able to part you!"

"Tee, hee, hee!" came a shrill neighing sound from close by.

It was the Sea Horse, who was bobbing about in the vicinity as usual. This must have been the first time he had laughed at a joke made by someone else and not himself.

"Tee, hee, hee!"

But neither the Hermit or the Rose minded, of course.

For the sea was so blue! The bluest sea in the whole world!

And life was such fun, so interesting!

So they joined in the happy song which they could hear all round them.

Nobody anywhere
The whole world over
Has more fun
Than fish in water!

sang the fish.

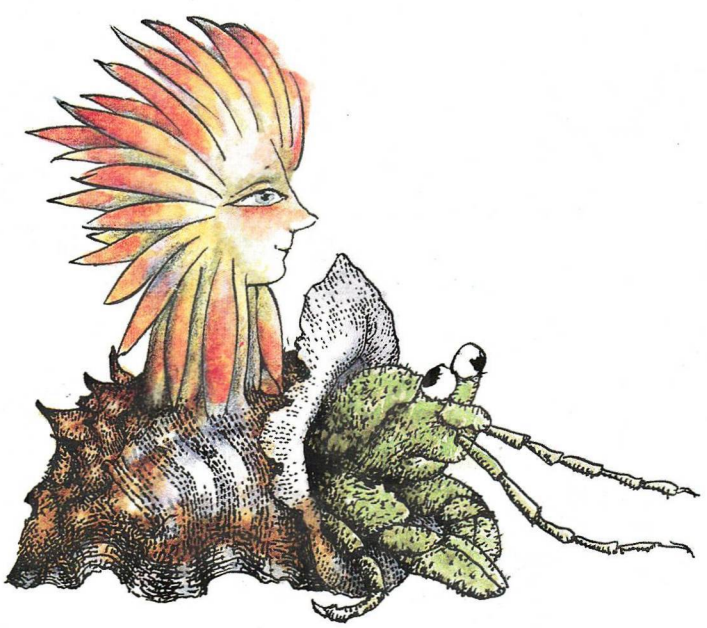
But we are such
Good friends, you see,

That even the fish
Envy you and me,

sang the Hermit and the Rose.

And I think they were absolutely right! Because if you find a friend and are singing a happy song together, you've got everything a person needs for perfect happiness!

Translated by K. M. COOK-HORUJY






LITTLE
GREY
STAR



"Well now," said Daddy Hedgehog, "this story is called 'Little Grey Star' but you can't possibly guess what it's about by its name. So listen carefully and don't interrupt. All questions afterwards."

"But are stars really ever grey?" asked Baby Hedgehog.

"If you interrupt me once more, I won't tell you the story," replied Daddy Hedgehog but noticing that his little son was going to cry, said more kindly, "No, they aren't usually, although this seems odd to me as grey is a most beautiful colour. But there was one Little Grey Star.

* English translation © Raduga Publishers 1982



"So then, once upon a time there was an ugly, clumsy toad, which also reeked of garlic, and had warts instead of spikes, all over him. Can you imagine that?! Uggh!

"Fortunately, he knew neither that he was so ugly nor that he was a toad. Firstly, because he was very tiny and didn't know much anyway, and secondly, because nobody had ever called him a toad. He lived in a garden where Trees, Bushes and Flowers grew, and you must know that Trees, Bushes and Flowers only speak to those very dear to them. And you wouldn't call someone you loved very, very much a toad, would you?"

Baby Hedgehog sniffed his consent.

"Well now, the Trees, Bushes and Flowers loved the toad very much and that's why they called him by the most affectionate names. Especially the Flowers."

"But why did they love him so much?" asked Baby Hedgehog very quietly.

Daddy Hedgehog frowned and Baby Hedgehog curled up at once.

"You'll soon find out if you keep quiet," Daddy Hedgehog frowned and continued, "When the toad appeared in the garden, the Flowers asked his name, and when he replied that he didn't know, they were very happy.

"'Oh, how wonderful!' exclaimed the Pansies (they spotted him first). 'Then we'll think up one for you! If you like, we'll call you ... we'll call you Pansy!'

"'Daisy sounds better,' chimed in the Daisies. 'It's a much prettier name!'

"Then the Roses intervened with the suggestion that he should be called Beauty; the Bluebells demanded he be



called Ting-a-ling (as this was the only word they could say) and the Marigolds proposed Goldie."

Baby Hedgehog chuckled and then glanced timidly at his father but Daddy Hedgehog wasn't angry because Baby Hedgehog was rightly amused. He calmly continued, "In short, they would never have stopped arguing if it hadn't been for the Asters and the Wise Starling.

"'Let him be called Astra,' said the Asters.

"'Or, better still, Little Star,' said the Wise Starling. 'It means the same as Astra, only it's simpler. What's more, he really does look like a little star: just look what sparkling eyes he's got! And as he's grey, you can call him Little Grey Star,

then there won't be any confusion! That's clear, isn't it?'

"And everyone agreed with the Wise Starling because he was very clever and could say several real human words and whistle almost a whole tune, which was about a famous Hedgehog, if I'm not mistaken. That's why people had built him a little home in a poplar.

"Since then everyone started calling the toad Little Grey Star. Everyone, that is, except the Bluebells who went on calling him Ting-a-ling as this was the only word they could say.

"'Star, my foot!' hissed a fat old Slug, creeping onto a rose bush and slithering towards its tender young leaves. 'Fine star he is! Why, he's a most ordinary-looking grey...'

"He was about to say 'toad' but didn't have time, because at that very moment Little Grey Star fixed its sparkling eyes on it and the Slug vanished.

"'Thank you, dear Little Star,' said the Rose, who had blanched with fear. 'You've rescued me from a terrible enemy!'

"And you ought to know," explained Daddy Hedgehog, "that Flowers, Trees and Bushes also have enemies, although they don't do anyone any harm, on the contrary, they only do good! Lots of them! But it's a good thing that these enemies of theirs are quite nice to eat!"

"You mean, Little Star gobbled up the fat Slug?" asked Baby Hedgehog, licking his lips in anticipation.

"Most likely," said Daddy Hedgehog. "Although I can't be sure. Nobody actually saw Little Star eat the Slugs, Beastly Beetles and Catty Caterpillars. But all the Flowers' enemies vanished as soon as Little Star fixed his sparkling eyes on



them. And they vanished for good and ever since Little Grey Star settled in the garden, the Trees, Flowers and Bushes began to enjoy life much more. Especially the Flowers because the Birds protected the Bushes and Trees from their enemies but the Flowers had nobody because they were too low for the Birds.

"That's why the Flowers loved Little Grey Star so much. They bloomed joyfully every morning when he came into the garden. All you could hear was: 'Come to us, Little Star!' 'No, to us first!' 'To us!'

"The Flowers spoke most affectionately to him, thanking and praising him to the skies but Little Grey Star kept modestly silent, for he was very, very modest, and only his eyes continued sparkling.

"A Magpie, which liked eavesdropping on humans' conversations, once even asked if it was true that he had a precious stone in his head which explained why his eyes sparkled so brightly!

"'I don't know,' said Little Grey Star confusedly. 'I don't think so . . .'

"'Well I never, Magpie! What a chatterbox you are!' said the Wise Starling. 'Not a stone but a muddle and it's in your head, not Little Star's! Little Grey Star's eyes sparkle because he's got a clear conscience. He's doing Useful Work, you see! That's clear, isn't it?'"

"Daddy, may I ask a question?" asked Baby Hedgehog.

"Ask all your questions afterwards."

"Oh, please, Daddy, just one!"

"Alright, just one."

"Daddy, are we . . . useful?"



"Very," said Daddy Hedgehog. "Don't you worry about that. But listen to what happened next."

"So, as I've already said, the Flowers knew that Little Grey Star was good, kind and useful. The Birds knew it, too, and so did, of course, People, especially Clever People. And only the Flowers' enemies wouldn't agree with this. 'Horrid, nasty thing!' they hissed, of course, when Little Star was out of earshot. 'Ugly, filthy little beast!' squeaked the Beastly Beetles. 'We've got to get even with him!' seconded the Catty Caterpillars. 'We simply can't get any peace with him around!'

"True, nobody paid any attention to their curses and threats, and what's more, the number of enemies gradually

dwindled, but unfortunately, the Nettle Butterfly, the Caterpillars' cousin, joined in the war. Although quite harmless and even rather pretty to look at, it was, in fact, terribly harmful. Such is often the case.

"Oh, and I forgot to say that Little Grey Star never touched Butterflies."

"Why?" asked Baby Hedgehog. "Aren't they nice to eat?"

"That's got nothing to do with it, dafty. Most likely because Butterflies look like Flowers, and, you see, Little Star loved Flowers very much! And he probably didn't know that Butterflies and Caterpillars are almost one and the same. Caterpillars, you know, turn into Butterflies and Butterflies then hatch new Caterpillars...

"So, the cunning Nettle Butterfly devised a crafty plan to destroy Little Grey Star.

"'I'll soon rescue you from this revolting toad!' she said to her Caterpillar Cousins and Beetle and Slug friends and then flitted out of the garden.

"And she returned being chased by a Very Silly Little Boy waving a cap in his hand, with which he thought he was going to catch the pretty Butterfly at any moment.

"But the cunning Butterfly only pretended she was about to be caught: she landed on a flower, as if not noticing the Very Silly Little Boy, and then suddenly took wing right in front of his nose and flew to the next flower-bed.

"And she thus lured the Very Silly Little Boy into the heart of the garden, to the very path where Little Grey Star was sitting and chatting to the Wise Starling.

"The Butterfly was at once punished for her mean trick because the Wise Starling streaked down from the branch



and snatched her in his beak. But it was already too late because the Very Silly Little Boy had spotted Little Grey Star.

"'A toad, a toad!' he shrieked in a very silly voice. 'Oooh, how disgusting! Beat the toad! Beat it!'

"Little Grey Star didn't realize at first whom he was speaking about. Nobody, you see, had ever called him a toad. He froze and then the Very Silly Little Boy aimed a stone at him.

"'Little Star, run!' screeched the Wise Starling in despair and almost choked on the Butterfly.

"At that moment a heavy stone crashed onto the ground near Little Grey Star. Fortunately, the Very Silly Little Boy had missed, and Little Grey Star managed to jump aside. The Flowers and Grass hid him from view but the Very Silly Little Boy didn't give up. He gathered a few more stones and started chucking them towards the swaying Grass and Flowers.

"'Toad! Poisonous toad!' he yelled. 'Beat the filthy brute!'

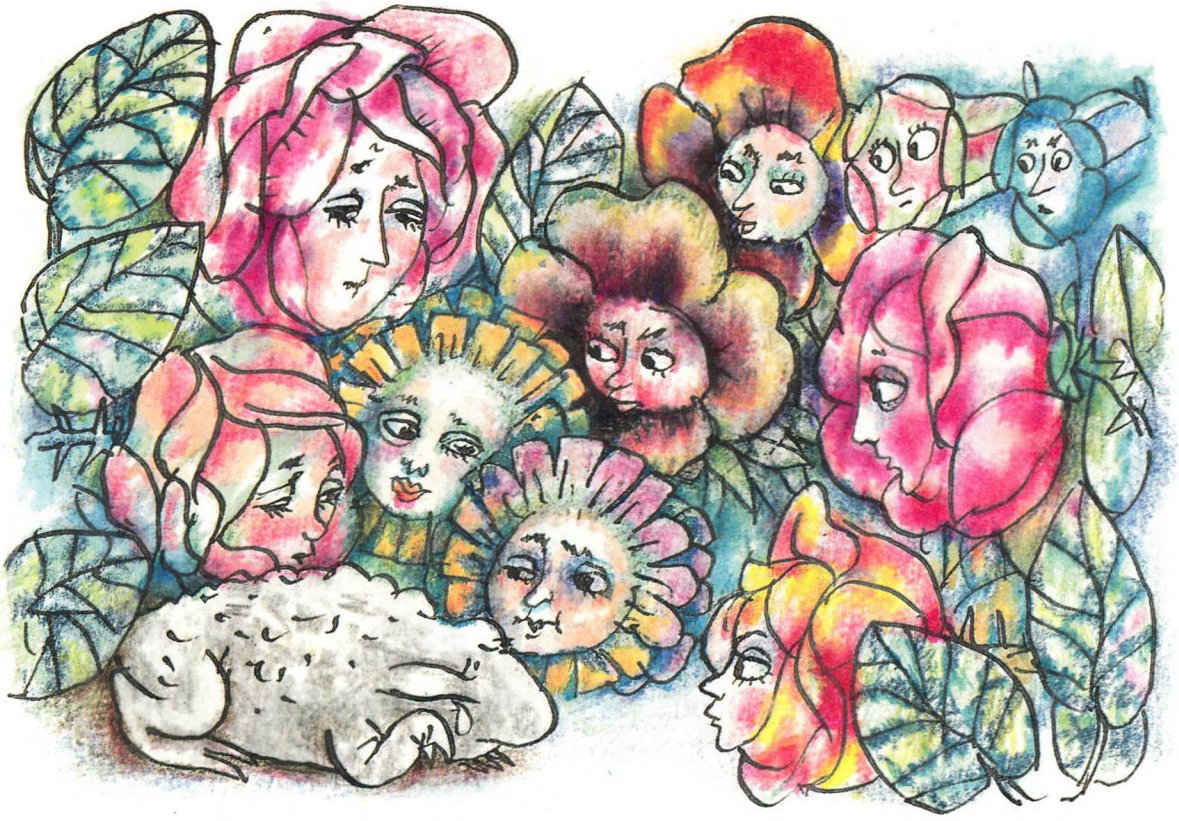
"'Little fool! Little fool!' screeched the Wise Starling at him. 'Why are you so muddle-headed? But he's useful, he is! That's clear, isn't it?'

"But the Very Silly Little Boy grabbed a stick and climbed into the middle of the Rose Bush where he thought Little Grey Star was hiding.

"The Rose Bush pricked him with her sharp spikes as hard as she could and the Very Silly Little Boy rushed out of the garden, howling."

"Hurrah!" cried Baby Hedgehog.

"Yes, dear, spikes are a good thing to have!" continued Daddy Hedgehog. "If Little Grey Star had had spikes, he probably wouldn't have had to cry so bitterly that day. But, as



you know, he didn't have spikes and that's why he sat under the Rose Bush's roots and wept very bitterly indeed.

"'He called me a toad,' he sobbed, 'a filthy brute! That's what Person said, and, after all, People know absolutely everything! That means, I'm a toad, a toad!'

"Everyone did all they could to comfort him: the Pansies said that he would always remain their dear Little Grey Star; the Roses said that beauty wasn't the most important thing in life (which was a big sacrifice on their part). 'Don't cry, Goldie,' seconded the Marigolds, and the Bluebells murmured: 'Ting-a-ling, Ting-a-ling,' which also sounded very comforting.

"But Little Grey Star was crying so bitterly that he couldn't hear the words of comfort. That's always the case when one

starts consoling too early. The Flowers didn't know this but the Wise Starling did only too well. He let Little Grey Star have a good cry and then said: 'I'm not going to comfort you, my dear. All I'll say is this: there's nothing in a name. And, in any case, it doesn't matter at all what some Silly Muddle-Headed Little Boy says about you! To all your Friends, you were and always will be Little Grey Star. That's clear, isn't it?'

"And he began whistling a tune about... about a famous Hedgehog to cheer Little Grey Star up and show that he considered the conversation over.

"Little Grey Star stopped crying.

"'You're right, of course, dear Starling,' he said. 'Of course, there's nothing in a name... But all the same... all the same I don't think I'll come into the garden in the daytime any more so as... so as not to meet anyone silly...'

"And from that day on Little Grey Star, and all his brothers, sisters, children and grandchildren came into the garden to their Useful Work only at night."

Daddy Hedgehog cleared his throat and said: "And now you can ask questions."

"How many?" asked Baby Hedgehog.

"Three," replied his father.

"Oh! Then... my first is: is it true that Stars, I mean, toads don't eat Butterflies, or is this only make-believe!"

"It's true."

"And the Very Silly Little Boy said that toads are poisonous. Is this true?"

"It's rubbish! Of course, I wouldn't advise you to put them in your hands but they're not at all poisonous."

"And is it true... Is this already my third question?"

"Yes, it is. That's all."

"What do you mean 'that's all'?"

"What I said. You see, you've already asked it. Your question was: 'Is this already my third question?'"

"Oh, Daddy, you're always teasing me."

"Oh, how clever you are! Alright then, so be it, ask your question."

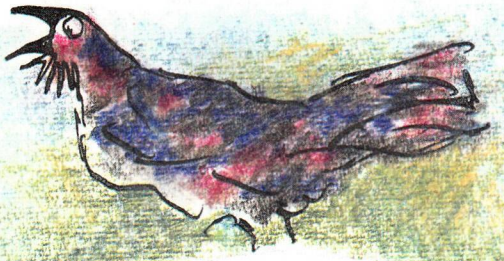
"Oh, I've forgotten... Oh, yes... Where did all those horrid enemies really vanish?"

"Why, he gobbled them up, of course. He simply seized them so fast with his tongue that nobody had time to notice, and it seemed as if they had just vanished into thin air. And now it's my turn to ask a question, my little furry one: isn't it time for us to go to sleep? After all, we're also useful and must also do our Useful Work at night, and now it's already morning..."

Translated by JAN BUTLER







LITTLE GREY HARE





Once upon a time there was a hare called Little Grey Hare who had a friend called Tadpole. Little Grey Hare lived in a forest glade, and Tadpole lived in a pond.

When they met, Tadpole would wiggle his tail and Little Grey Hare would drum his paws. He talked to Tadpole about carrots, and Tadpole talked to him about waterweed, and it was great fun.

* English translation © Raduga Publishers 1988



One day Little Grey Hare went to the pond, but Tadpole wasn't there. Not a sign of him!

A little frog was sitting on the bank.

"Hey, Froggy!" Little Grey Hare said. "Have you seen my friend Tadpole anywhere?"

"No, I haven't," sniggered Froggy, chuckling to himself. "Tee, hee, hee!"

"There's nothing to laugh about," cried Little Grey Hare. "My best friend's got lost, and all you can do is laugh! Silly thing!"

"I'm not silly," said Froggy. "You're the one who's silly! Fancy not recognising your own friend. It's me."

"What do you mean–you?" asked Little Grey Hare, puzzled.

"I'm your old friend Tadpole!"

"You?" Little Grey Hare cried in astonishment. "You can't be! Tadpole had a tail, but you haven't. You don't look a bit like him!"

"I may not look like him, but I am him all the same," Froggy replied. "It's just that I've grown up and turned into a frog. That's what always happens."

"Fancy that," said Little Grey Hare. "So it always happens, does it?"

"Of course it does. Everyone changes when they grow up. From a grub into a mosquito, from spawn into a fish, and from a tadpole into a frog, everyone knows that! There's even a little rhyme about it.

Tadpoles whether fast or slow
Into little frogs do grow."

And at this point Little Grey Hare decided to believe him.

"Thanks for telling me," he said. "I'll have to think about that."

And so they parted.

Little Grey Hare went home and asked his mother:

"Will I soon grow up, Mum?"

"Oh, yes, dear, very soon," said his mother. "When the leaves turn yellow, you'll be big. We, hares, grow quickly!"

"And what will I turn into?"

"What do you mean–turn into?" His mother was puzzled.

"What will I be when I grow up?"

"Oh, that's easy," said his mother. "You'll be a big handsome hare, like your father."

"We'll see about that," said Little Grey Hare.

And off he ran to find what he would like to turn into.

"I'll take a look at everybody who lives in the forest and turn into the one I like best," he thought.

The saucy little creature!

As he walked through the forest, birds sang all around.

"That's nice," thought Little Grey Hare. "Why don't I turn into a bird? I could just fly about singing songs. I like singing, but we, hares, sing so quietly that nobody can hear us."

No sooner had he thought this, than he saw a bird sitting on a branch. A gorgeous bird, bigger than a hare, with fine black feathers. It was singing a lovely song.

"Boo, boo, boo! Chuff-chuffick!"

"Aunty Bird!" called Little Grey Hare. "What's your name?"

"Chuff-chuffick!" replied Wood-grouse, for him it was.

"Uncle Wood-grouse, how can I become a bird?"



"Chuff-chuffick!" replied Wood-grouse.

"I want to turn into a bird," Little Grey Hare explained.

But all he got in reply was:

"Boo, boo, boo! Chuff-chuffick!"

"Can't he hear properly?" thought Little Grey Hare. He was just about to go up to the bird when he heard footsteps.

"A hunter! Look out, Uncle Chuffick!" cried Little Grey Hare. He hardly had time to hide in the bushes, before some shots rang out. Bang! Bang!

Little Grey Hare peeped out. There was a lot of smoke and

feathers floating about. The hunter had shot off some of Uncle Wood-grouse's tail.

So much for Uncle Chuffick!

"No," thought Little Grey Hare. "I don't want to be a wood-grouse. They sing nice and loudly, but they don't hear properly. No wonder they lose their tails. We hares always keep our ears pricked, on the alert."

So off he ran, singing a little song to keep his courage up, the Brave Hare's Song. This is how it went.

Five, four, three, two, one!
Along came a Hunter with his gun!
All of a sudden out Little Hare popped,
Hunter raised his gun and shot!
Biff! Baff! Goodness me!
Hunter's climbing up a tree!

Singing made him feel nice and cheerful.

Then he saw Squirrel hopping from branch to branch.

"She does hop well," thought Little Grey Hare. "Just as well as me! Perhaps I should be a squirrel."

"Squirrel, Squirrel, come here!" he called.

Squirrel hopped down to the lowest branch.

"Hello, Little Grey Hare," she said. "What do you want?"

"Tell me what it's like being a squirrel, please," Little Grey Hare asked. "I'm thinking of becoming one."

"Oh, it's very nice indeed," said Squirrel. "We have a lovely time, hopping from branch to branch, cracking cones and nibbling nuts. Only we have a lot of work to do, like building nests and gathering mushrooms and nuts for the winter. Still

you'll get used to that. Climb up here and I'll teach you the things a squirrel has to know!"

Little Grey Hare walked up to the tree, thinking: "So they have a lot of work to do... We hares don't have a care in the world. We don't build nests or dig holes..."

He started to climb up a tree, but he went all dizzy.

"No," he said. "I don't want to be a squirrel! We hares weren't made to go climbing trees!"

Squirrel laughed, tut-tutted and threw a cone at him.

Fortunately it missed.

On went Little Grey Hare until he came to a clearing where some little mice were doing somersaults. Little Grey Hare watched.

Suddenly they all turned and fled for their lives.

"Fox! Fox!" they squealed.

And sure enough there was Lady Fox with her fine fur coat, white bib, ears pricked and tail held high. A splendid sight!

"Surely they can't be afraid of such a fine lady," thought Little Grey Hare.

He walked out boldly, bowed and said:

"Good day, Lady Fox! May I ask you something?"

"Here's a saucy one!" Lady Fox exclaimed in surprise. "Alright, only hurry up. I don't waste words on the likes of you."

"It won't take a minute. Teach me how to be a fox. Tell me what it's like. I think you're marvellous!"

Lady Fox was very flattered.

"Well," she said. "I don't do anything special, just kill what I catch, and eat what I kill! That's all there is to it!"



This terrified Little Grey Hare, but he didn't show it, only wiggled his ears.

"So that's why everyone's afraid of you!" he said. "No, I won't be a fox. We hares never raise a paw against anyone else."

"A good thing too," said Lady Fox. "If hares turned into foxes, who would we, foxes, have to eat?"

And her big eyes glittered as she bared her teeth. Any minute now she would pounce on Little Grey Hare and that would be the end of him.

But Little Grey Hare was up and away even before she had finished talking! He said to himself, as he sped along: "Fancy her wanting to gobble up a live hare! That means if I were a fox I'd have to eat myself."

Little Grey Hare ran round the forest for a long time and saw all the animals. With the exception of the wolf, who was even crueller than the fox, he liked them all. But there was always something wrong with them.

He wanted to be a mouse, but they're so small, or a hedgehog, but they're so prickly. Nobody would stroke him, and hares like to be stroked. Or a beaver, but it was so wet in the river.

He almost decided to be a bear. Bear told him that he ate honey, and honey was even sweeter than carrots. But Little Grey Hare didn't want to sleep the whole winter away in his lair, sucking his paw.

"We, hares, can't do that," he said. "We were made to run about."

And on he ran until he came to a marsh in the forest.

Then he stopped short in amazement.



There stood a splendid Beast, as huge as can be, bigger than a bear, with long legs, two pairs of ears, as long as a hare's, and the kindest eyes you ever saw.

He stood there, munching grass and gnawing an aspen branch.

Little Grey Hare thought he was absolutely wonderful.

He bowed low to be Beast.

"Good day, Uncle," he said. "What is your name, please?"

"Good day, Little Grey Hare," said the giant. "My name is Elk."

"Why do you have two pairs of ears, Uncle?"

Elk laughed.

"You must have mistaken my antlers for ears," he said.

"Why do you need antlers?"

"To protect myself from enemies," said Elk. "From wolves and the rest of them."

"Oo, how marvellous!" said Little Grey Hare. "But what's it like being an elk?"

"Nothing special. We gnaw branches and munch grass."

"Do you eat carrots?"

"Yes, carrots too, if we get hold of them."

"And you don't eat other animals?"

"Goodness me, no," Elk replied. "What an idea!"

This made Little Grey Hare like Elk even more.

"I'll be an elk," he thought.

"And you don't climb trees?" he asked.

"Certainly not! What for?"

"And you can run fast?"

"I should say so," Elk laughed.



"And you don't sleep in a lair in winter and suck your paw?"

"Who do you think I am, a bear?" Elk laughed.

Little Grey Hare made up his mind to be an elk.

But just in case he decided to ask one more question.

"Does it take long to be an elk?"

"No, not very long," said Elk. "You have to grow for five or six years, then you turn from a little elk into a real big one!"

This upset Little Grey Hare so much, he almost burst into tears.

"No," he said. "We, hares, can't take five years to grow up. Good-bye, Uncle Elk! I can't do it..."

"Good-bye, laddy," said Elk.

And Little Grey Hare ran off home.

On the way he passed the pond. There were yellow leaves floating on it now. Froggy was sitting on a large leaf. He had grown much bigger, of course. He was almost a fully-grown frog by now, but Little Brown Hare recognised him all the same.

"Hello, Tadpole that was!" he called.

He recognised Froggy, but Froggy did not seem to recognise him. He took fright and dived into the water.

Little Grey Hare was surprised. "What's the matter wit him?" he thought.

Froggy poked his head out of the water and said:

"Silly thing! Fancy giving people a fright like this!"

"You're the silly thing, not me," Little Brown Hare laughed. "Fancy you, Tadpole that was, not recognising your friends. It's me!"

"What do you mean–you?" Froggy asked, puzzled.

"It's your old friend, Little Grey Hare."

"Well, I never," said Froggy. "But you're not little anymore. You're a real Grey Hare now!"

And back into the water he dived.

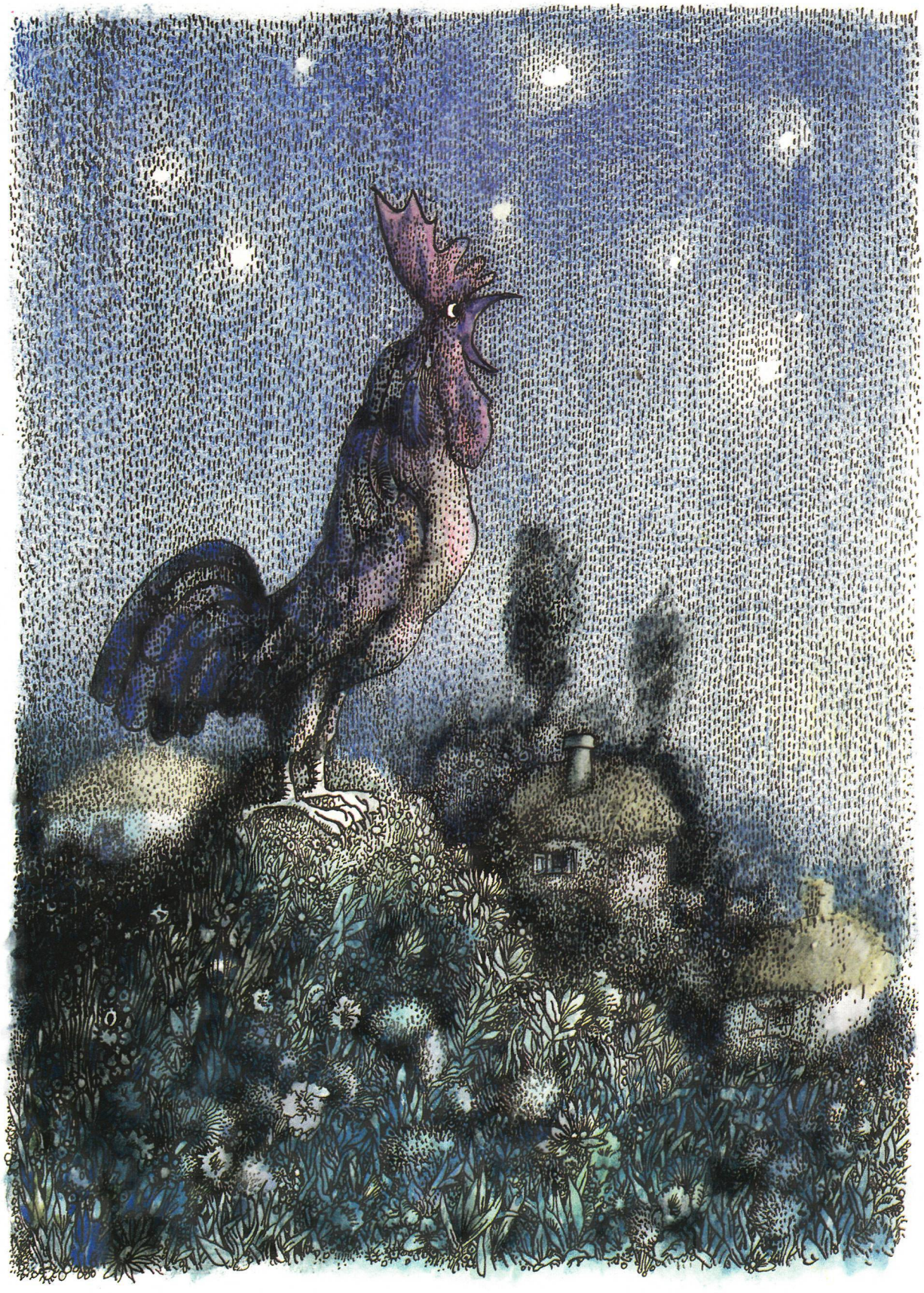
Little Grey Hare looked into the water when the ripples had died down.

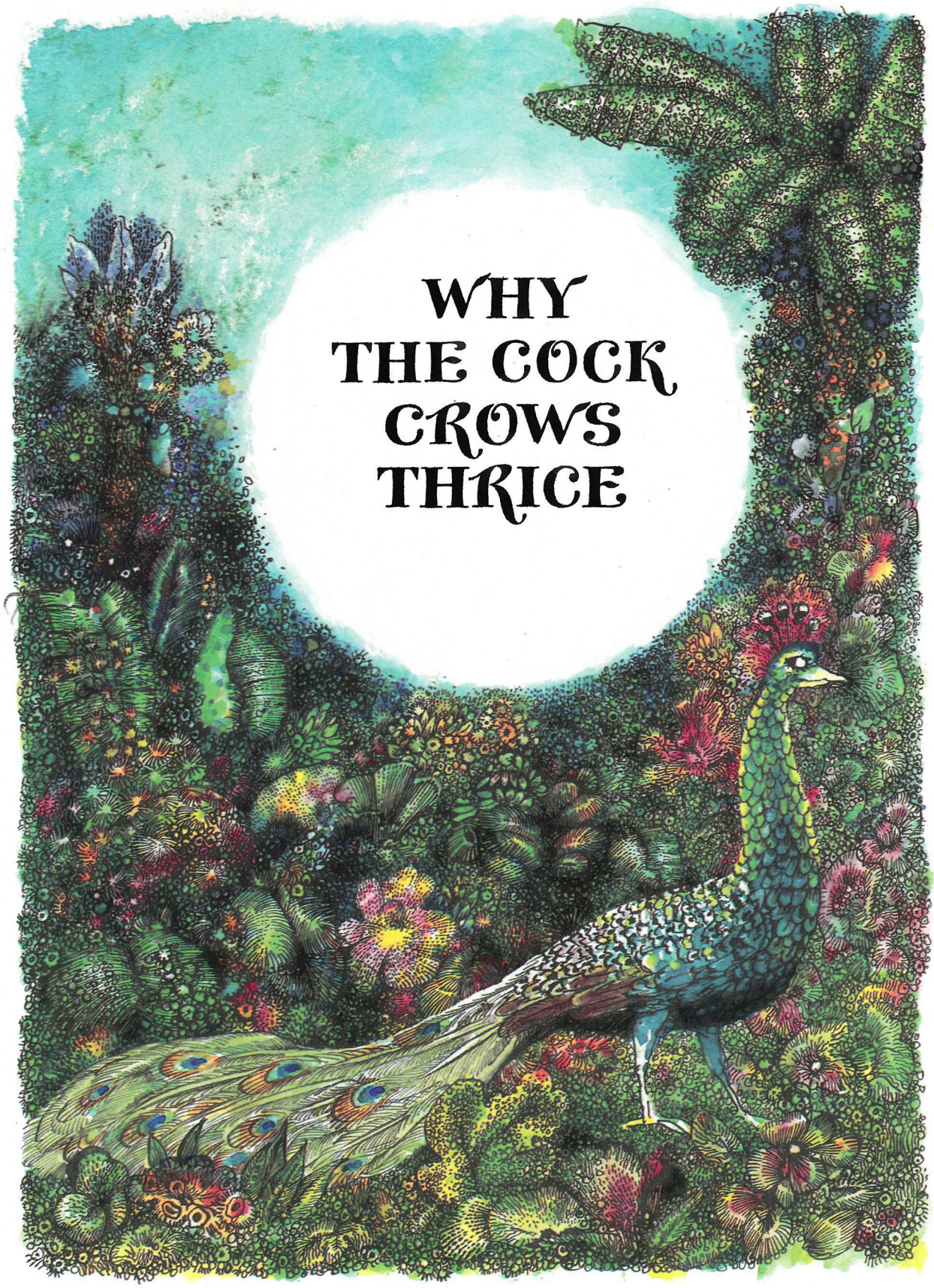
And he saw that he really had turned into a big handsome hare. Just like his father, with nice thick fur, strong paws, big eyes and the finest pair of ears you've ever seen!

And he drummed his paws with sheer delight.

Translated by K. M. COOK-HORUJY






WHY
THE COCK
CROWS
THRICE



In the olden days, the Cock had the most beautiful tail: dark blue with splodgy patterns and fine traceries of brilliant colour. The Peacock, on the other hand, was dock-tailed. He did have a tail of sorts, but it looked more like a mistake.

The Peacock was envious of the Cock. One day he came up to him and said:

"Cock, nice Cock! Lend me your tail. I've got to go to a wedding and I do so want to dress up fine for it."

"What an idea," said the Cock. "Whoever heard of lending a tail?"



"But I'll give it back!" said the Peacock.

"When?"

"When I get back from the wedding, of course."

"And when will that be?"

"Depending on how the wedding goes! This evening, or at midnight, or perhaps we'll be making merry till dawn."

"Well, no later then," said the Cock, "or the hens will laugh at me in the morning."

The Peacock promised him to give back the tail.

The Cock gave him his tail. The Peacock put it on–and took himself off.

The Cock was left without any tail at all, waiting for the Peacock to come back from the wedding. Evening came, the sun went down–and no Peacock.

The Cock hopped up onto the fence and gave two or three loud crows, but the Peacock did not come. "He must be having a good time at the wedding," thought the Cock. The hens had already gone to roost, and the Cock dozed off too. He dozed and dozed, but all the time he never quite forgot about his tail. Soon it was midnight, such pitchy darkness you couldn't see your hand before your face. "Oh dear," thought the Cock, "I hope the Peacock doesn't get lost on the way back from the wedding." He shook himself and started to crow. He crowed and he crowed, but no! There was no sign of the Peacock.

Again the Cock dozed off, but he was restless: worried about his tail. He dreamt that the Peacock had been attacked by robbers on his way back from the wedding, and they had taken his tail.

At first light the Cock woke with a start. Was the Peacock still not back? No! Again he began to crow:

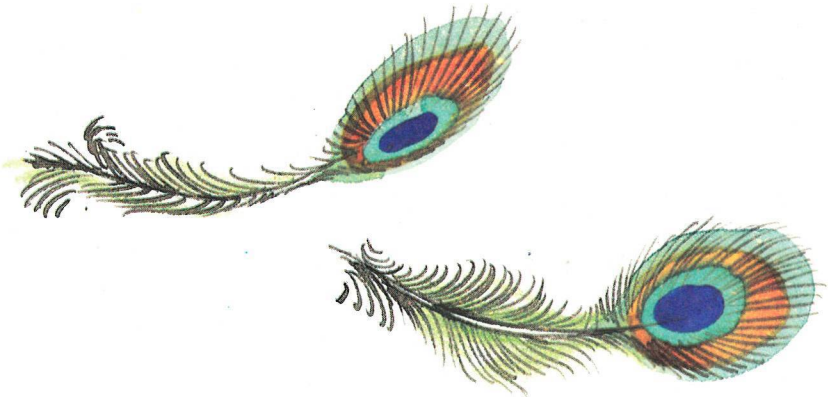
"Cock-a-doodle-doo! Peacock-a-cock-acoo! Come here!"

What a hope! Overnight the Peacock had made off to India, and there he stayed. Never to be seen again in those parts.

Many years passed, much water flowed under the bridges, the Cock grew a new tail, but still he missed the old one.

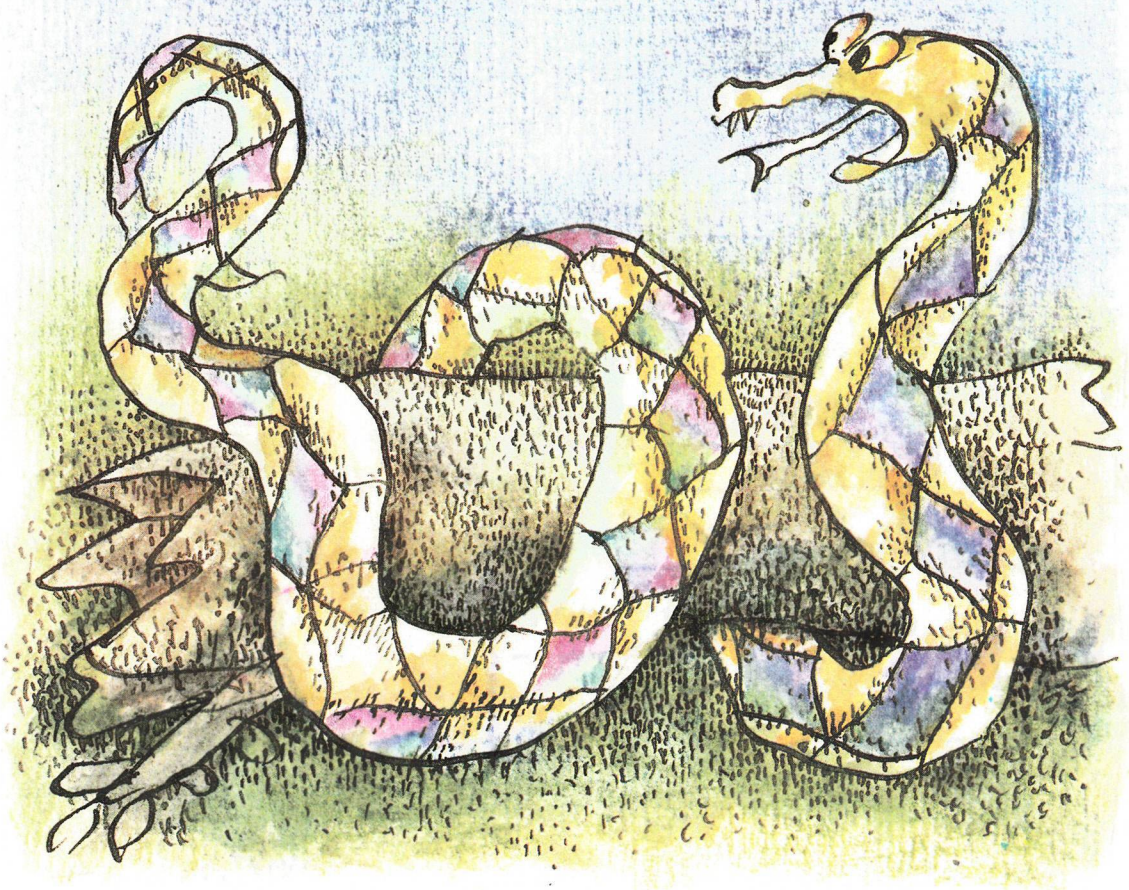
And so, ever since, he has called three times every night. After all, you never can tell... some day the Peacock may bring back his tail: what do you think?

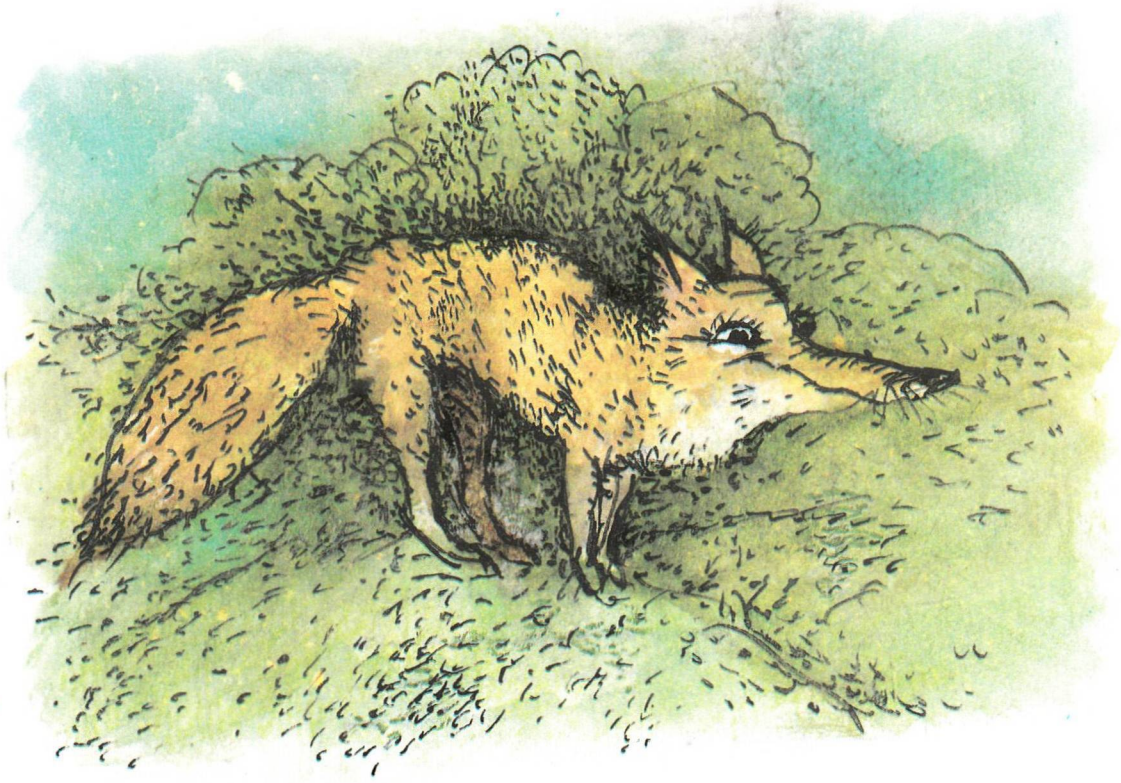
Translated by AVRIL PYMAN





THE FOX'S RULING





It happened long, long ago at a time when wild animals could talk and even the trees put in a word every now and again.

A peasant was walking through the wood when he saw that a great tree had fallen and was crushing a snake under one heavy branch. The snake was struggling and writhing but could not break free.

She saw the peasant and called out to him:

"Have pity on me, help me to get free! I shall know how to show my gratitude."

The peasant took pity on the snake and raised the branch. Now the snake was a poisonous one. No sooner was she free than–pshsh!–she was up onto his shoulders, had wound herself round his neck and was hissing in his ear:

"Now I shall bite you!"



So much for the gratitude of snakes!

The peasant said:

"You should be ashamed of yourself, Viper, I have saved you from death and you want to kill me!"

But the snake only repeated: "I'll bite, I'll bite!"

"Oh no, you don't," said the peasant, "that won't do at all. Let us call in a judge. He will give us a ruling which of us is right. We'll ask the first person we see."

The snake agreed. They went into the forest and who should they meet but Red Fox.

They told her exactly what had happend.

"Be our judge, Red Fox," said the peasant. "Only judge fairly, in good faith."

"All right," the Fox replied. "I'll be your judge. Only I can't give you a quick verdict, just like that. First I must see exactly what happened. Let's go back to the place where you first fell out with one another. I'll give you my ruling there."

They came back to where they had started. Judge Fox said:

"Now go back to the places where you both were when the disagreement began."

The peasant raised the branch, the snake slid back to where she had been and he immediately let go of the branch so that the snake was again trapped.

"And now," said Judge Fox, "get out as best you can, Viper! That's my ruling."

I don't know about the snake, but the peasant was quite satisfied.

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you, Judge Fox, for judging between us so fairly, in good faith!"

The Fox answered:

"Not so fast! Oh no, you won't get away with just a 'thank

you'. I shall require a sack of good things from you for my trouble."

The peasant was surprised.

"We never made any such bargain," he said.

But the Fox persisted: give, give, give!

"So that's the sort you are!" thought the peasant. "Well, just you wait. I'll teach you a lesson."

"All right," he said. "Let's go back to my house. I'll give you a sack of good things."

He went back home, bundled his dogs in a sack, tied it up tightly and carried it out to the Fox.

The Fox was delighted, for the sack was very heavy.

"Aha," thought the Fox. "The peasant's been really generous!"

She shouldered the sack and made off to her lair. But curious to see what was inside she sat down on the road and untied the sack. Out leapt the dogs and attacked her, tearing her fur coat to shreds.

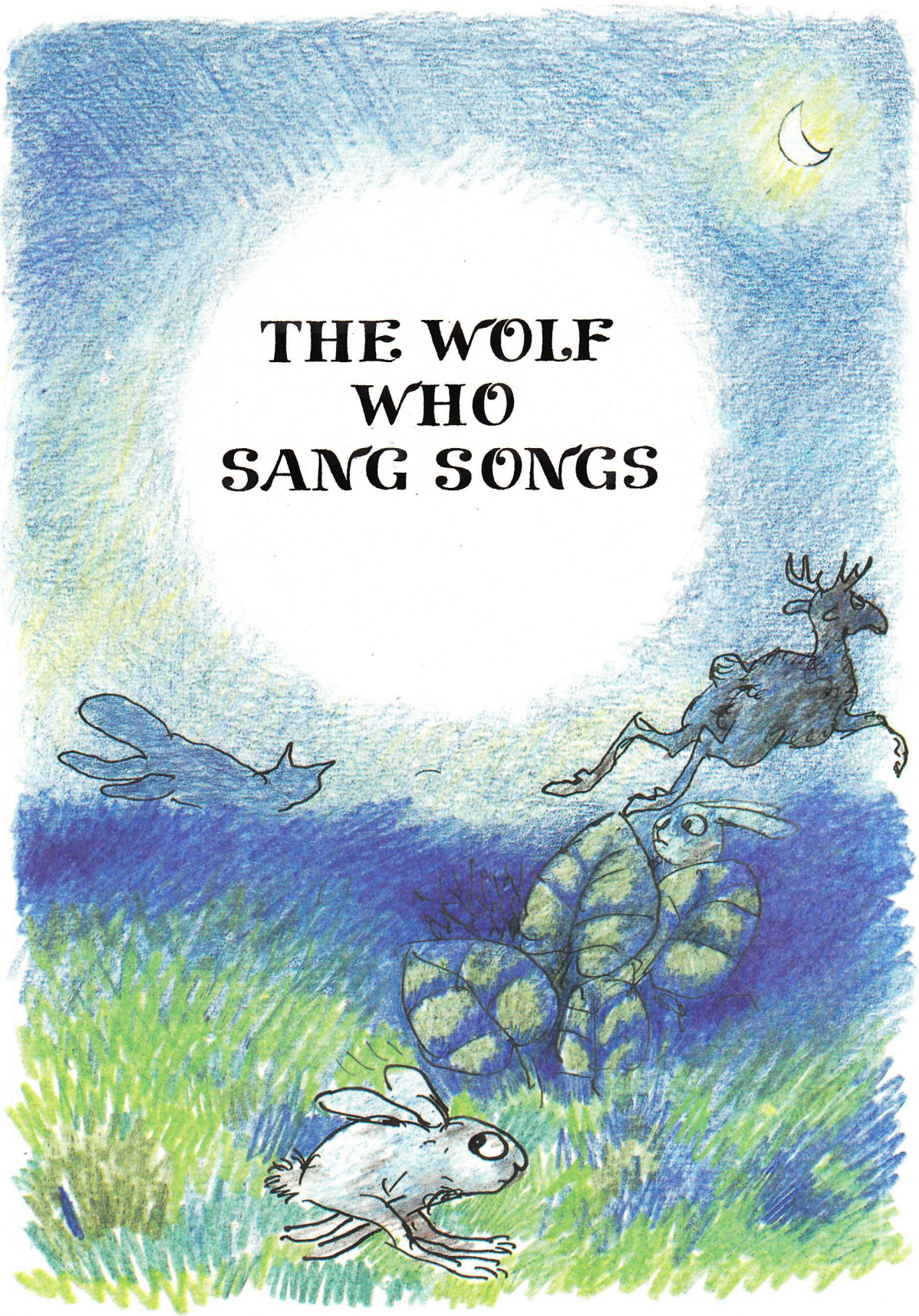
The Fox ran home and sat licking at her torn fur and muttering to herself: "My Grandfather was never a judge and my father was never a judge, so why the devil did I go setting myself up as one?"

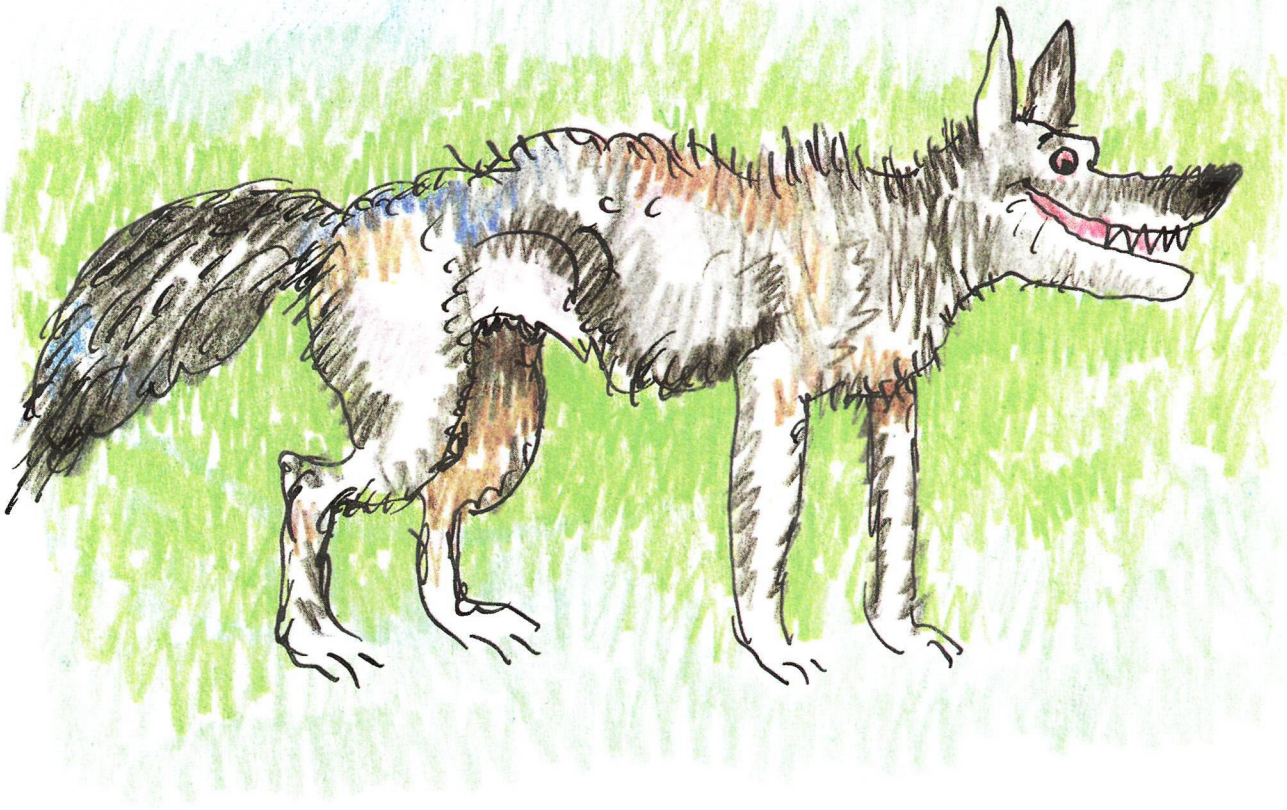
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THE WOLF WHO SANG SONGS



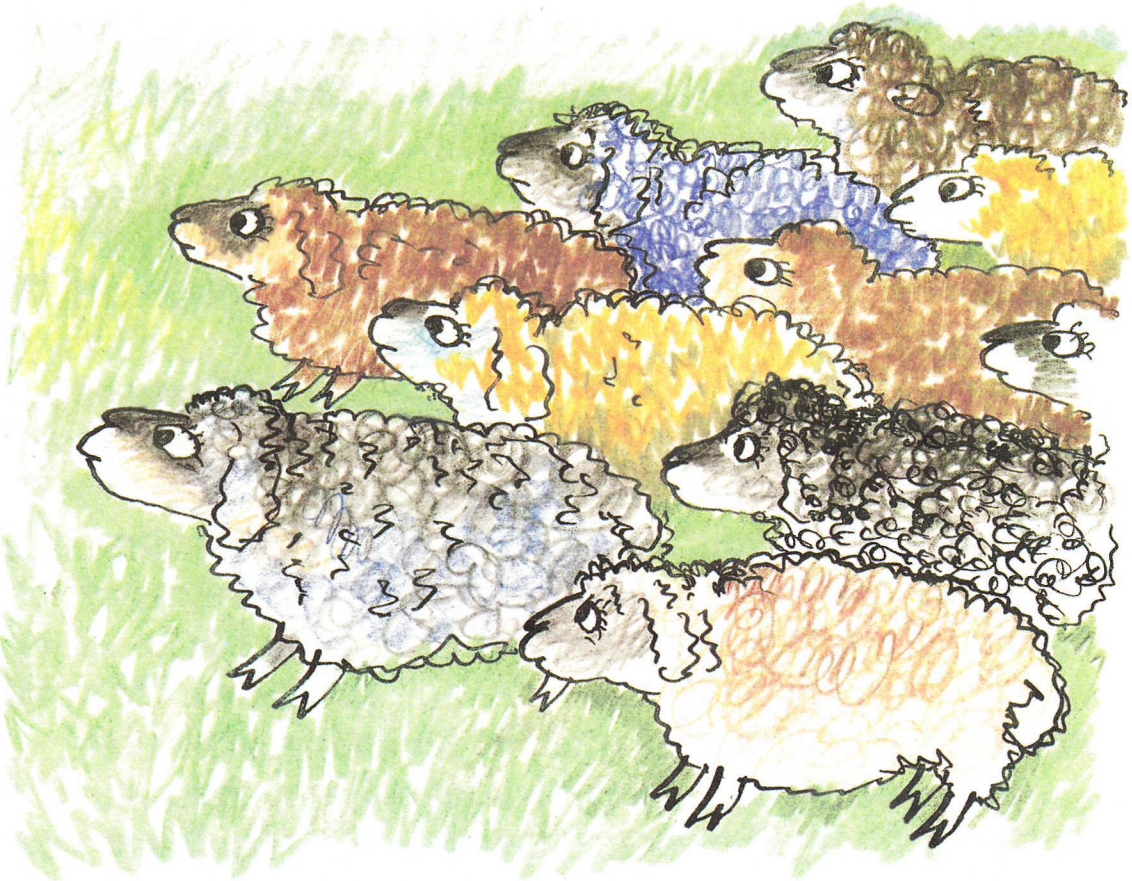


Once upon a time, in the forest, there lived a grey wolf, enormously fierce. He lived all right, but for everyone else in the neighbourhood life was not worth living.

It was not just that he behaved like a regular brigand, dragging off good and bad alike to his lair: it was the dreadful way he would howl. Other wolves only howl when they're hungry, but this shaggy old bandit would kill a calf, gorge himself sick on it, and then strike up a song. A wolf, of course, only has the one song:

"I'll kill you-ou-ou! I'll eat you-ou-ou!"

So terrifying and repulsive was his howling that all the creatures–except of course, Screech Owl and Tawny Owl–tried everything to stop their ears from it. Yet he seemed to



revel in it: he would pause for breath and then strike up the same old song.

"Oo-oo-oooooo! I'll eat you-ou-ououou!"

Well, once he had been howling in this way all night. He howled and howled and only fell silent towards morning when at last he fell asleep. He would have slept all day long, but the sun rose and sent a warm ray to tickle his nose.

Grey Wolf was so sleepy he thought it was a fly and snapped at it! Nothing there–only his teeth clashed together; a second time he snapped . . . missed again; a third time . . . and bit his own tongue. By then he was wide awake and Red Fox happened to be passing by, carrying a fat hen.

"Hi, Grey Wolf," she called. "No more sleep for you! What

do you think you're doing snoring your head off when there's a flock of sheep grazing in the glade down by the stream and no shepherds or dogs! Over there!" At that Grey Wolf forgot all about sleep.

"Is that trrrue?" he snarled.

But why should Red Fox lie? She knew what she was talking about.

Grey Wolf sped off in the direction she had pointed out and, sure enough, there were the sheep, about a hundred and fifty of them all on their ownsomes...

They saw the wolf, trembled and huddled together in a solid mass. There they stood, poor things, bleating away and expecting every moment to be their last...

Grey Wolf licked his chops. "A-a-a!" he snarled. "Now I'll eat you all up!"

And he would have, too, only suddenly one sheep stepped out from among the others, bowed to Grey Wolf and said:

"You can eat us any time you like, Sir. But if Your Mercy would be so good–"

"Mercy?" the wolf snarled. "What mercy do you ask of Grey Wolf?"

"Well, you see, Sir, it's like this: we have no one to give us the note when we sing. Don't take it personally, please, but we enjoy singing, too. We used to have a choir-leader–a ram with a great voice, almost as loud as yours, but they drove him away somewhere. Wouldn't you help us to get our choir going again? You could always eat us afterwards! It would be no trouble for you: you are such a famous musician, we hear you every night, can't sleep for listening to you!"

Grey Wolf was most flattered: "Really, you can't sleep?"

"How could we think of sleeping!" replied the sheep. "We don't get a wink, Sir, really we don't!"

"Hm! All right then," said Grey Wolf. "I don't see why not. Only mark, you all do as I say, or I'll do you!"

Grey Wolf climbed up onto the stump of a tree and started up his usual song:

"I'll kill you-ou-ou! I'll eat you-ou-ou!"

And the sheep, all in chorus, responded:

"M-m-m-misery, m-m-m-e! La-a-ack-a-day de-e-e-e!"

"Wrong!" yelled Grey Wolf. "Less noise from the basses there! Let's hear the descant!"

And off he went again: "Oo-oo-oo-oo-ooh!"

And the sheep: "Ba-a-a! Ma-a-aa!"

They made such a din that soon they had roused the whole village and people and dogs came running from all sides.

And that was the end of the wolf who sang songs.

Translated by AVRIL PYMAN



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Б. Заходер

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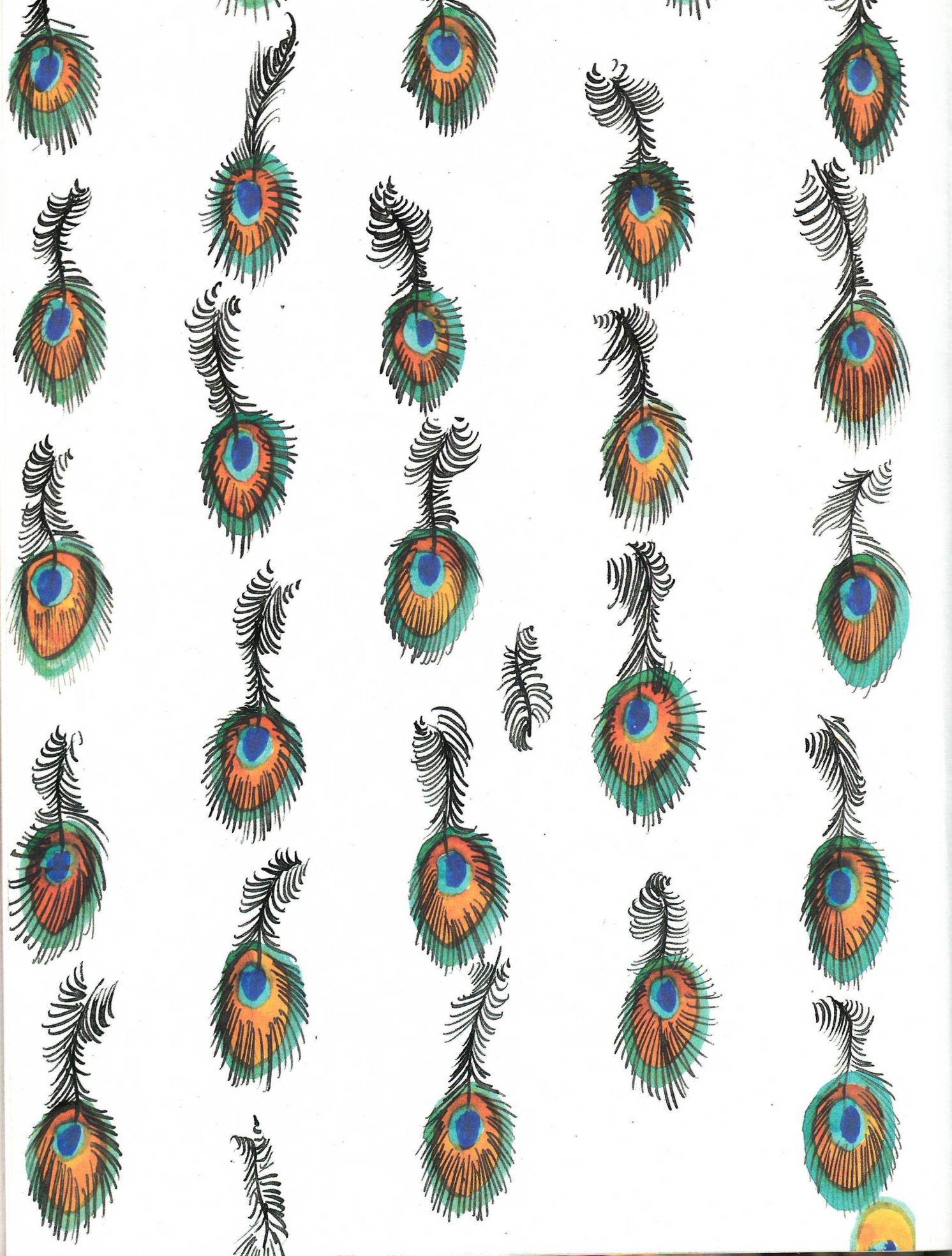
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